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CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHY OF A FIFTEENTH CENTURY SUFI SAINT OF BIHAR.

[By Syed Hasan Askari]*

In 1811-12 Francis Buchanan found in the "Division of Daudnagar" in the Gaya Dt. "at least 500 Pirzadas who were mostly descended from Mahbub Subhani (Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani), a saint buried at Baghdad" (in 571-1175). "One of the eleven sons" of this celebrated founder of the Qadri order of Sufis, "Abdul Keza" (Razzaq) was the direct ancestor of "Muhammad Qadri", "who", we are told by Buchanan, "came here and destroyed the infidels and was buried at Amja (Amjhar) where his descendants have 3 whole manors". Amjhar, a village 10 miles to the north east of Daudnagar, and some 25 miles from Palmarganj Station of E.I. Railway in Gaya District, is still the seat of a Khanqah—founded by Syed Muhammad Qadri in the middle of the 15th century A.D. and its "Chief Pirzada" and "Gaddinashin" in the time of Buchanan was Shah Manzelat Ali[1] who probably represented the line of one of the three sons of the saint. The descendants of the saint had already in the time of Buchanan branched out into many families and are now found spread over the Districts of Gaya, Patna, and Shahabad.[2] They are said to have been in possession of valuable manuscripts and records, but only one of them Moulvi Syed Ahmad, Uruj Qadri, representing the line of Sulaiman Qadri,[3] a grandson of the saint and the first of a long line of Qazis and Naib Qazis[4] since the time of Akbar down to that of the East India Company could be persuaded to show a few

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1 This name does not occur in *Bisala-i-Jawadia* a persian ms. containing genealogical tables with some incidental notices (kindly lent to the writer by Hakim Shuaib Saheb of Phulwari). Probably the author wrote it before Buchanan.

2 A *Farman* of Alamgir I, dated 2nd Zihijja, 14th year of Julus, made a *mokarri* grant, by way of *Madad Maash*, in village Muhammadnagar *alias* Jogia with *Dakhli* of Rasulpur in Parganah Danwar of Sarkar-i-Shahabad to the sons, dependents, adherents, fakirs and wayfarers attached to Syed Abdur Rasul, a descendant of Mahbub Subhani. He was the son of Abdullah a grandson of the eldest son of the saint of Amjhar.

3 See an interesting account of him in *Risala-i-Jawadia*. *Mahzarnama* with the stamp office seal of Calcutta, dated 1833 says that he was appointed by Akbar as Qazi of Parganas Ancha & Manorah in Aurangabad sub-division of Gaya district.

4 The *Risala-i-Jawadia* document contains a list of the various personages of the family who held the offices of the Chief and Naib Qazis.

of the documents in his possession[1]. These include, besides a few *sanads* and *Firmans,* some granted to the family members, others submitted to them as exhibits, a valuable Persian manuscript of 51 folios, entitled *Manaqib-i-Muhammadi,* which contains an account of the founder of the Amjhar Khanqah and his sons and adherents, written by Ali Sher Shirazi, one of his chief companions, only six years after his death in 946 as is evident from a versified chronogram[2] found at the end of the manuscript. Shirazi refers to another biography of the saint in Arabic, *Tarikh-i-Husaini,* by Karimuddin Husain Makki, which, unfortunately, is no longer available. The same is the case with *Daqaiq-ul-Haqaiq*[3]. *Tahzib-ul-Quran*[4] or *Hizbul Adiya* by the saint-founder of Amjhar and with *Fatawa-i-Masudi*[5] by Amir Masud Qadri, his grandson and a Qazi in Akbar's days. In spite of the many references to the miracle-working powers of the saint and things which cater to the needs of the credulous, there is much in Shirazi's work of cultural and historical interest.

This manuscript of ten chapters contains much information about the early[6] life and the activities of the saint outside India and about the various stages of his training and education, the courses of studies he followed, the institutions where, and the savants under whom, he studied, his habits, manners and customs, his physical[7] appearance, his dress,[8] his piety and zeal for Islam, his hobby for learning and acquiring proficiency in the languages[9] of other peoples and countries, and the men whom he met and who became devoted

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[1] By virtue of the office of Qazi held by them they used to receive such documents and perhaps some of them could not be returned. Among them are (i) a *Farman* of Shahjahan, dated 1043 granting *Madad Maash* lands in Pargana Balia of Sarkar Bihar to Bibi Mah Koch, Md. Asim etc., (ii) Shahjahan's *farman,* dated 29th year Julus or 1065 addressed to Raja Jaswant Singh regarding disputes about certain lands in Bihar with his brothers (iii & iv) Two *Sanads* issued on behalf of Md. Shah (30th Julus) and Alamgir II (6th yr.) appointing the recipients Qazi of pargana Shahjahanpur in Bihar.

[2] The relevant lines are "Giraftam Qalam Ra Bebastam Do Lab-Nawishtam Manaqib Ham Andar Seh Shah-Tu Az Harf-i-Fael Wa Harf-i-Zaman-Bekun Sale Tarikh Guftan Ayan". Three times of the numerical value of the word *shab* which is 906 plus that of *Mim* which is 40 representing darfzaman and Harf-i-Fael give the year.

[3] *Risala-i-Jawadia.* Of this 6 pages in the handwriting of the saint himself had been kept as a treasure by Chindas, Kanungo of Manauro.

[4] Tazkirat-al-Mumajjad.

[5] A member of the family is said to be still in possession of this rare work but he refuses to let any one consult it.

[6] Born at Baghdad in 816 A.H., he had completed his education and become an accomplished scholar when he was only 23 years old. After practising many austerities he began his missionary activities at the age of 27.

[7] Big-bodied with sinking belly, large forehead, thin expanded eyebrows, high nose, broad nostrils, long white beared with sprinkling of black hair at the time of death, broad chest, average-sized fingers, eyes and ears, and fair complexioned.

[8] *4th Chapter.* Wore a latia cap sticking to the head; and white or green in colour, with a white turban, arranged in knots and circular in form, and a white 'pairahan' or long robe with shirts with a blanket (?) of black wool round the body.

[9] *Chapter 6* on speech and language "During his travels wherever he went he lost no time in picking up the local dialects.....within the frontiers of India he was in position to speak to the Indian Mashailkhs (holy personages) in their own language with correct pronunciation".

to, or admirers of, him during the course of his journey from Iraq to India. Although these things are not devoid of interest for a student of history and culture, lack of time and space compels the writer to relate only a few facts connected with the life of the saint in India.

The first thing which strikes one's notice in the manuscript is the definite reference to the peaceful penetration of Islam and to Muslim settlements at such an early date in those parts of Gaya bordering on Chotanagpur, which as late as the time of Hunter "consisted of hills and jungles abounding with wild animals"[1]. The manuscript was completed in 3 nights at Kutumba, mentioned in the *Ain*, at the instance of a local resident, Hakim Munawwar, who had welcomed and become a devotee of the saint and has been described as "the Plato of the time and the Aristotle of the Age". The author had been deputed by the saint to carry on his work in the regions of Kutumba and, as we learn from another source[2] he lies buried there. Some other villages, inhabitated by the Muslims, including Hasipur whose chief, Malik Qazim, was at first hostile to the saint and later relented and founded a village named Mahuli after the Mahua tree, and where the Khanquah of Shaikh Ahmad had been situated have been mentioned. Syed Sulaiman Mashhadi, a devotee and adherent of the saint of Amjhar died "a martyr for the sake of God" and his shrine lies Navnava in Pargana Ekil, situated in subdivision of Jahanabad, in Gaya.

It was for the sake of Islam that Syed Muhammad undertook the arduous journey to Hindustan. Touched by the tale of woe narrated by a refugee from the present Aurangabad sub-division namely "the pious and tall-statured, Shaikh Muhammad Ali, and also commanded in a dream", as the biographer would have us believe, Syed Darvesh, the father of Syed Muhammad, directed him to "attend to the complaint of, and secure justice for the Indian from his oppressor, try to bring the latter into the fold of the faith, and failing that pray for his overthrow and settle down in that land so that the people thereof might find the true path through his guidance". He was also instructed to marry in a family of good extraction preferably in that of Syed Ahmad Qadri who had already migrated to India. The saint traversed with his forty companions, the whole distance from Baghdad to Bihar, full of hills and dales, deserts and plains, on the back of horses and camels, within a period of 7 months and 11 days in 846 or 1442 A.D. During the journey he passed through Qandhar[3] and Multan,[4] and also stopped for a fortnight at Surharpur in U.P.

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1 Hunter, W. W., *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. XII*; p. 18.

2 *Risala-i-Jawadia.*

3 The ruler of Kandhar had already heard of the reputation of the saint from Syed Nasiruddin Tabrizi and he and Shaikh Mansoor, the most learned man there, gave him a fitting reception.

4 He was introduced to the Sharif by 'Makhdoom Syed Agli Siraj-ul-Millat Waddin' one of whose three sons, Sulaiman Mashhadi, accompanied the saint in his journey to India.

where he married Bibi Piyaran (a significant Indian name). He arrived near the strong-hold of the tyrannical Kol chief named Jiwan.

Kols and Santhals, Mundas and Oraons, Cheroes and Kharias, of Chotanagpur are supposed to have been at one time the governing tribes in different parts of Bihar. According to traditions recorded by Buchanan, the territory of the Kol Rajas may have at one time extended from Baidyanath to Banaras and the English statistician noted that much of the country in South Bihar was "dotted here and there with rude forts which local tradition rightly attributed to the Kols or wild tribes of Central India". He found relics of the three great fortresses of the Kol chiefs in Kabar, Kutumba or Ramghar and Shahabad. Ali Sher Shirazi has also added something to our knowledge in this respect. We are told that the place where the saint arrived and which later came to be known as Narahna was a lowland near which a river (Raud) was flowing and it was infested with wild beasts and reptiles. Pointing to a fortified place which stood at the extremity Shaikh Muhammad Ali cried out "This is the fort of the tyrant who practised oppression on us and made my brothers, their wives and sons, martyrs because one of our relations had gone to the length of entering into discussion with him and had declared that the idols and idolworshippers were futile and false. At this the lord of the fortress destroyed all our relations. I, however, managed to survive the carnage and laid my grievances before every one but none cared to come to my help". The saint approached the tyrant "whose name was Jiwan and who belonged to the tribe called in India Kolhia". He said "Why did you kill the Musalmans? Do you not feel afraid of God the Great Avenger? It is better for you to tread the path of peace (Islam) otherwise you will have to face retribution". The Kolhia burst out in anger "What have you got to do with me? Be off". The saint returned to the wilderness of Narahana and prayed to God for punishment. It so happened that on account of a heavy downpour the walls of the fortress collapsed killing Jiwan and his family under the debris. The brother of Jiwan Kolhia named Karmoon Kolhia who had his stronghold at Dumra, one *kos* from there, began the search of the saint but finding no trace of him gave up the pursuit.

The saint continued to practise austerities in the wild and inaccessible regions where many a miraculous thing were seen. During his stay in the jungle a cowherd became a convert and he was "given religious lessons in Hindvi" and was named Sadiq. He used to supply milk to the saint and his followers. One day he saw two brothers, Haji Khan and Jami Khan, in a distressed condition and lamenting over their lot on the bank of the river. He elicited the

information from them that they were the employees of "Darya Khan,[1] the ruler (Wali) of Bihar" who had sent them to Sasaram to purchase a horse for him from a dealer there. The horse while being lead across the river got accidently drowned. They felt mightily afraid of their lord and master, Darya Khan, who they said, was "a man of ferocious disposition". They were brought to the saint who taking pity on them successfully prayed to God for the restoration of the horse but he enjoined upon them not to disclose this affair to the Wali of Bihar lest the animal might be lost again. They could not, however, resist the temptation of doing so with the result that the horse ultimately died as had been foretold. But the ruler of Bihar on knowing the whole affair became so impressed with the saint's miraculous powers that he sent presents in cash and kind which were accepted. He ordered a mosque, a *Khanquah*, and a mansion (*koshak*) to be built at the place where the incident had taken place.

The fame of the saint spread far and wide, specially after so much attention had been bestowed on him by the powerful ruler of Bihar, and crowds of people began to come to him. He, therefore, directed his followers to leave the place for a more inaccessible wilderness. Sadiq felt astonished at this end and questioned him "O my lord? Why are you leaving such a furnished villa?" "As he was a Hindi (Indian) and was not so intelligent and sharpwitted as to understand the reality of things, His Holiness replied to him also in 'Hindvi' only this much. 'Na Mana Jiva Inha Na Rahna'" (my heart did not permit me to stay here). From that time that jungle along with the stream came to be named Narahna and all are now heard speaking of it as 'Narahana'.

After some months the saint came to, and settled down at, Amjhar. One day the Muezzin's call to prayer having reached the ears of Karmoon Kolhia, he enquired about it and was told that the saint "whose pursuit he had given up largely on account of the fear of Darya Khan, the ruler of Bihar, was likely to create such a situation as might eventually result in the loss of the wild tracts over which he exercised his sway". At this he sent a body of non-believers with orders to kill the saint and his followers but they were struck by lightning and were either destroyed or dispersed. He then sent his own son, Chattr, at whose orders stones were pelted at the saint while he was engaged in his prayers and his forehead was badly wounded. This provoked Shaikh Muhammad Majzub so much

[1] Darya Khan Luhani (Nuhani Khaskhael) of Bihar, a contemporary of Sultan Sikandar Lodi and his son and successor, who, besides his own province took possession of the whole country east of the Ganges and defeated in several engagements the troops sent against him by Sultan Ibrahim Lodi. He died not long before the death of the Sultan at Panipat. He was succeeded by his son, Bahar Khan, the patron of Farid Khan Sur (later Sher Shah) and to him the rebellious chiefs in Bihar transferred their allegiance proclaiming him king under the style of Muhammad Shah. According to the author of *Makhazan-i-Afghania* Darya Khan had also proclaimed his independence and assumed the style of sovereignty such as the reading of the *Khutba* and issuing of coins in his own name.

that he managed to kill Chattr and buried him near the stream. His men who had already lost heart ran away. This brought Karmoon Kolhia himself on the scene. After some exchange of words between him and Shaikh Hassan when the Kol Chief raised his sword to kill the saint, as it was the will of God, he died with his own weapon.

All this, as also some other incidents such as the visit of the saint to Hashipur at the invitation of Shaikh Ahmad, the slights and insults shown at first and remorse and contrition eventually shown by Malik Qazin, occurred within a year of the arrival of the saint at Narhana for Shaikh Hassan who figured prominently in all these affairs was sent in 847 to Surharpur in U.P. to fetch the newly-wedded wife (Piyaran) of the saint. But Shaikh Hassan died at Surharpur and was buried there. Bibi Piyaran had to be escorted by the men of her brother, Syed Hussain. The saint observed on one occasion, "However much I wish to live in isolation and retirement so as to avoid the crowds I feel helpless before God who seems to have ordained otherwise". A disciple from Bengal, Shaikh Masud, sent a purse containing 100 gold pieces which were at once distributed among the followers to meet their expenses and provide clothes for them. Strange things continued to happen such as the miraculous escape from the watery grave of Usman Khan and Miyan Khan who were coming on boats from Shekhpura, and the suggestions received in a dream by a learned man of Biharsharif, named Bhikhan Bihari, to betake himself to the saint and to become a tutor to his two sons, Jalaluddin and Muinuddin, who were born respectively in the year 849 and 868 A.H.

The medieval age was an age of superstitions. People believed in all sorts of abnormal things and supernatural elements. There is nothing surprising, therefore, that we got accounts of such things in this manuscript. But shorn of all that is unbelievable, the analytical sketch given above contains some very valuable information about the zeal shown by the early Muslims for the propagation of their faith, in unknown lands infested with wild beasts, among semi-Hinduised local chiefs of aboriginal tribes like Kols who had thrown up fortifications and exercised sway over rough jungles and wild impeneterable tracts; the indifference displayed by the local Muslim rulers to individual cases of ill-treatment of their co-religionists; and the last but not the least, the effective method adopted by the adventurous Sufi preachers and missionaries to find an entrance into the hearts of the natives by learning their language[1] and communicating

[1]The contribution of Bihari saints towards the evolution of the mixed language of Urdu or Hindustani was by no means negligible even before the saint of Amjhar made India his home and the final resting place and cultivated the language of the indigenous population so as to make it a medium of inter-communication and exchange of thoughts and religious beliefs. We find the celebrated saint of Biharsharif, Makhdum Sharfuddin Yahaya Maneri using such expressions as "Bat Shali par Sankri-Des bhala per dur". This occurs in his *Malfuz, Maadan-ul-Maani* compiled by his well known companion, Sheikh Badra Zain Arabi in 747 A.H. or 1357 A.D.

their thoughts and beliefs through their spoken tongues. The word *Inha* in the Hindi utterance of the saint quoted above is particularly significant for in rural areas of Bihar it is still in use. The observation of the saint made in reply to the question put by his biographer regarding the superiority of the Indians as linguists forms an interesting reading. One may not agree with him when he says that Adam who knew all the languages was sent down from heaven to Ceylon (Sarandip) which is a part of India, and that the "Suhuf" (scripture) of Adam was also in the Hindvi language" and so on and so forth: but it is a fact admitted not only by him but by others also, notably by the celebrated Amir Khusru in his *Masnavi,* Nuhsepahr, that the "Hindian (Indians) are capable of learning any language they like and acquiring a command over it as if it was their mother tongue while the same is not the case with others who feel inclined to learn Hindvi". The references to and the names mentioned of the three Kol chiefs and the mention of Darya Khan Luhani, the ruler of Bihar have got their own significance.

The author of *Manaqib* enjoyed, like the saint of Amjhar, a fairly long life, having performed *Tawaf* of Kaaba eight times with him, accompanied him to India, and outlived him. He therefore tells us much not only about his spiritual guide but also about his sons and daughter and grandchildren and about the most intimate and pious disciples such as Shaikh Hasan 'Madani-ul-Quraishi', Shaikh Muhammad Majzeb, the silent, Syed Alauddin Tabrizi, Malik Tajuddin "commonly known as *khandasher*[1] for be was sharp tongued as sword", Syed Sulaiman Mashhadi, Syed Ali Manikpuri, Syed Shamsuddin Husaini, etc.

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[1]The presence of such Hindi words in the Ms. is significant. The author Ali Sher Shirazi, appears to have taken pains to learn the indigenous language. He once said to his spiritual guide: "Of all the languages the letters in the Indian lexicons are the largest in number and that is the reason why non-Indians cannot pronounce all their letters as well as they do. Their language appears to be the most difficult. However much we try, we are unable to reach the height of eloquence in it. What is the reason"?